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Memorandum of Conversation
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DATE: January 10, 1963
12:00 Noon
Secretary's office

SUBJECT: U.S.-Soviet Relations

PARTICIPANTS:

U.S.
The Secretary
John C. Guthrie, Director, SOV

U.S.S.R.
Vasily Vasilyevich Kurnetsov,
First Deputy Foreign Minister
Anatoliy F. Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador
Lev Isaakovich Medeleovich,
Assistant to Kurnetsov
Viktor Pavlovich Larpov,
First Secretary of Embassy (Interpreter)

RECORDS:

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Kurnetsov thanked the Secretary for the opportunity of seeing him. He said that the Secretary, of course, knew why he had been sent here by Chairman Khrushchev. After two and a half months the talks on the Cuban situation in New York had concluded and it was therefore considered useful for him to meet the Secretary now. At his meeting with the President yesterday, the President had expressed the opinion that while the results of the New York talks had not been everything which might have been desired, the text of the joint letter to the UN Secretary General did represent progress. The Secretary interjected that both the President and he appreciated the genuine effort Kurnetsov had made to achieve agreement in New York. Kurnetsov replied that the United States representatives had also been very expert and frank, expressing U.S. positions very clearly. The resulting general atmosphere had been business-like and this was encouraging.

Looking back to the end of October, Kurnetsov continued, we may say that an important conclusion should be drawn in order that we might move ahead and that U.S.-Soviet relations will be even better. He had agreed with the President's statement that relations between the two countries should be good. The important conclusion which clearly emerges from the crisis is that when our two mighty powers display sincere efforts to reach agreement on important problems affecting the fate of mankind, they do can agree. During the crisis constructive steps had been taken by the Soviet Government and Khrushchev in his exchanges with the President. The President had also taken constructive steps and as a result agreement was reached which permitted a solution to the crisis. This very

important

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important circumstance has been noted in Moscow. But with this, it is worth saying that it took only five days to agree to avert thermonuclear war but two and a half months to agree on a document reflecting the essence and spirit of the basic agreement.

Khrushchev said that he wished to stress that the role of our two countries is outstanding as the whole world recognizes. It is, therefore, important to try over and over to improve our relations and to combine our efforts for the solution of bilateral and international problems in the interests of maintaining and consolidating peace. The Soviet Government agrees with the President that now that the New York negotiations have been concluded, the way has been paved to a certain extent to give more attention to other international problems. With regard to our relations, there is still something to do and the USSR is not satisfied with the present status. Khrushchev has made quite clear the sincere desire of the USSR to do everything possible to improve relations in order to remove obstacles in the path to the betterment of relations and then to unite our efforts to solve other problems. The Secretary probably realizes, Khrushchev said, that the relations between us play an important role in international affairs and the world situation depends to a great extent on our relations. Khrushchev said he had no particular problems in mind but believed the Secretary knew what they were. He did mention that our economic relations, specifically trade, are unsatisfactory and that our cultural relations, although some results have been achieved in this field, could be still further improved. The Soviet Government would like to do its best to clear away obstacles.

The Secretary said that he was very interested in Khrushchev's views. We are interested in improving our relations, as the President said. We do not doubt that the President and Khrushchev bear very heavy historical responsibilities in this phase of world history. Both men understand this. This is one reason why the President has sought to maintain effective channels of communications between us. But the historical importance of our relations for good or ill makes us feel we must maintain effective communications channels and not just in the physical sense. The Secretary observed that when he became Secretary he had not dealt with Soviet affairs for some 10 years. He has observed one noticeable difference between the two periods inasmuch as it was now possible to talk with some degree of understanding across the ideological gap which separates us. One of our great problems, the Secretary said, is that we must recognize our very important ideological differences. We both try to understand our differences and we must also try to enter into the other side's thinking. There was still much to be done in this area.

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Twelve to 14 years ago, the Secretary observed, he had talked with Jakob Malik in New York and had agreed with him to talk about what each did not like about the other's policy. We should try to explore genuine common interests objectively considered and attempt to establish real communications with each other. While he had been speaking about the general subject of communications, the Secretary said he also wished to talk about the problem of physical communications. Recently the United States Government had offered to establish on a reciprocal basis radio transmitters in the Embassies in Moscow and Washington. For the United States this represented simply a desire to improve our technical communications with our Embassy. Rapidity of communications is a matter of joint interest. The Secretary noted that the Soviets have two leased lines to the United States whereas we have none to the USSR.

Kennedy said that he did not know the details of this problem but promised to take it up upon his return to Moscow. With regard to the Secretary's comments on the general spirit of our relations, Kennedy asserted that people in the USSR live in a magnificent and happy period. Khrushchev is a very real man who knows the spirit and thoughts of the rank and file. He is a most devoted fighter for good relations between our two countries and for the maintenance and consolidation of peace. Your President, therefore, has a good partner, Kennedy said, and you were lucky that you had Khrushchev as the head of the Soviet Government in October.

However, there are some groups in the U.S. who were not interested in having good relations with the USSR. This is not the case in the Soviet Union so that the U.S. has more difficulty in this sense than does the USSR. It is important not to look backward in the search for peace. Unfortunately, such tendencies do exist in the U.S. and it is up to the United States Government to handle this situation. Sometimes even United States officials show signs of this pressure. For example, in December at a press conference the Secretary had said that the system in Cuba was inconsistent with Western Hemisphere ideals. This sentiment reflects backward views and impressions.

The Secretary opined that it might be well for the two Foreign Offices to make up a group of four or five people, yours to try to think like Americans and ours to try to think like the Soviets. As for his December 10 press conference, the Secretary noted that the President had stated a year and a half ago that there were two points in regard to Cuba which were not negotiable: its political-military alliance with an outside power and interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

Kennedy

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Kuznetsov observed that mutual understanding was very important but asked the Secretary whether he did not think that at this stage each side understood something about the policies of the other. Ideological differences cannot be solved. However, the USSR freely admits that even in the light of this basic difficulty we can solve important problems in the interest of peace and humanity. United States official policy is based on the understanding that a country's social system is not part of its legal system. In the United States there is a theory that the Western Hemisphere is a special place which should only be bound by the ideals now found there. Not everyone will agree with this, Kuznetsov said. The situation in Latin America is not so ideal that it does not require change. Indeed, many governments in the Western Hemisphere seek change. The Soviet Union wishes for friendly relations with other countries, especially the United States, and it does not wish ideology to interfere.

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